UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1834
17 February 1995

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council expresses deep concern at continued fighting around Bihac safe area and deplores serious humanitarian situation there.

+ WFP reports serious malnutrition and hunger in Bihac enclave; a second UNHCR food convoy is stopped from reaching pocket by breakaway Abdic forces; UNHCR warns of tragedy unless regular humanitarian deliveries are resumed.

+ Human Rights Commissioner José Ayala Lasso says situation in Burundi has deteriorated seriously in recent days; fears tragic explosion there unless world community helps strengthen country's democratic institutions.

+ Secretary-General greets cease-fire between Ecuador and Peru; reiterates his offer to help two countries consolidate their truce.

+ Secretary-General welcomes release of Operation Lifeline Sudan relief workers; condemns latest flagrant violation of humanitarian principles and targeting of relief personnel.

+ Cost of deploying 30 additional UNAMIR civilian police observers estimated at $590,000 for first six months by Secretary-General in report to Security Council.

+ Secretary-General recommends seat of International Tribunal for Rwanda be located in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania; says justice and fairness require trial proceedings be held in neutral territory.

+ Regional conference in Bujumbura on refugees, returnees and displaced persons builds consensus for plan of action on voluntary return of refugees, aid to asylum countries and security in refugees camps.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

+ Chief Prosecutor for International Tribunal in former Yugoslavia outlines logistical difficulties in establishing Prosecutor's office; says Tribunal will bring charges against leaders who ordered crimes and conceived policies.

* * *

The Security Council said today it is deeply concerned at the continued fighting around the Bihac safe area and deplored the serious humanitarian situation in the area. In a statement by its President, Legwaila J Legwaila (Botswana), the Council reiterated the importance of full compliance with the agreements between the Bosnian parties on the cease-fire and on the complete cessation of hostilities in Bonsnia and Herzegovina concluded in December. All involved must make a concerted effort to consolidate what had been achieved so far to avoid the risk of a renewed outbreak of hostilities.

The Council demanded that all forces in the Bihac area cease fighting immediately and cooperate fully with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in achieving an effective cease-fire. It also reiterated its condemnation of the continued violations of the international border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It condemned recent obstruction of humanitarian convoys destined for the Bihac area by the Croatian and Abdic forces. It welcomed the fact that the convoys were now getting through, and called for all parties to facilitate the unhindered flow of humanitarian assistance and UNPROFOR's complete freedom of movement.

* * *

The World Food Programme (WFP) has reported, for the first time, serious malnutrition and hunger in the war-stricken Bihac enclave. Between 10 to 20 per cent of the 200,000 people still in the pocket were at risk of imminent starvation, the agency said. The situation was particularly grave for the 40,000 in Bihac town, where at least 13,000 displaced persons are living within the small city centre in abandoned, blown-out houses.

Meanwhile, a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) food convoy trying to reach the Bihac pocket today was blocked by breakaway Bosnian forces led by Fikret Abdic, according to a United Nations spokesman. The 10-truck UNHCR convoy which reached Bihac yesterday was the second this month and represented only 5 per cent of the enclave's monthly requirement of nearly 2,000 metric tons of food. The UNHCR was extremely concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the Bihac region, where people were on the verge of disaster, said UNHCR Special Envoy Anne-Willem Bijleveld. If a tragedy was to be avoided, regular and safe humanitarian access must resume.

* * *

The human rights situation in Burundi has deteriorated seriously, particularly in the last few days, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, José Ayala Lasso. Speaking before the Human Rights Commission in Geneva today, Mr. Ayala Lasso said he had received

(more)

alarming reports on the political crisis centred around key figures in the country. More than ever, Burundi was in danger, and he was afraid of another tragic explosion like the one in Rwanda unless immediate action was taken.

Mr. Ayala Lasso said the international community should focus on Burundi and assist the country in strengthening its democratic institutions and ensuring full respect for human rights and fundemental freedoms. It was imperative to act so as to establish a climate of tolerence and mutual respect whereby each and every citizen was not considered a Tutsi or a Hutu but a member of the Burundese nation.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today welcomed the news that a cease-fire has come into effect between Ecuador and Peru, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Secretary-General applauded the mediation efforts of the four countries -- Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States -- which are guarantors of the 1942 Protocol between Ecuador and Peru. He also welcomed their readiness to send military observers to facilitate implementation of the cease-fire and other measures aimed at reducing tensions and permitting a peaceful search for agreement on outstanding issues.

The Secretary-General appealed to the Ecuadorean and Peruvian Governments to continue their cooperation with the four guarantors in working out a lasting solution to the problems that have caused the dispute. He also reiterated his earlier offer of support to help the two countries consolidate the truce. The spokesman said a number of United Nations agencies were giving humanitarian assistance to people who had been affected by the hostilities.

* * *

The Secretary-General has learned with satisfaction that the 11 relief workers of Operation Lifeline Sudan, taken hostage on 8 February, have been released unharmed. The Secretary-General, none the less, condemned this latest flagrant violation of humanitarian principles and all targeting of relief workers, a United Nations spokesman said today.

The Secretary-General stressed to all concerned that Operation Lifeline Sudan was conducted strictly in accordance with the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and humanity. He called on all concerned to respect those principles and to ensure the security of relief personnel, as well as their unimpeded access to affected populations. The relief workers taken hostage were from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Médecins du Monde, Save the Children/United Kingdom, and Swiss Disaster Relief.

* * *

The cost of deploying an additional 30 observers with the civlian police component of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) would amount to over $591,000 for a six month period, according to the Secretary-General. In a progress report on UNAMIR, he said the monthly cost

(more)

thereafter would be approximately $90,000. Should the Security Council decide to approve his recommendation to increase the number of observers from 90 to 100, the costs related to the increase should be considered an expense of the Organization to be borne by Member States.

* * *

The Secretary-General has recommended that the seat of the International Tribunal for Rwanda be located in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania. In a report to the Security Council dated 13 February, the Secretary-General said while the international character of the Rwanda Tribunal was a guarantee of the just and fair conduct of the legal process, it was nevertheless necessary to ensure the appearance of complete impartiality and objectivity in the prosecution of persons responsible for crimes committed by both sides to the conflict. With the atmosphere now prevailing in Rwanda, bringing into the country to stand trial, leaders of the previous regime alleged to have commited genocide would entail serious security risks.

The Secretary-General said the choice of Kigali as the seat of the Tribunal, even if premises were available, would have entailed extensive and costly repairs to make them operational. Arusha had readily available premises, which might be offered rent-free, or at a very low rate. The city's proximity to victims, witnesses and potentially accused persons situated in Rwanda and neighbouring States, and its accessiblity by air to those locations, would considerably reduce travel costs.

* * *

The Special Representative for Rwanda, Shahryar Khan, today joined the final session of the joint regional conference on refugees, returnees and displaced persons being held in Bujumbura, Burundi. The conference, which is jointly sponsored by the UNHCR and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has been slowly building a consensus for a plan of action on the voluntary return of refugees, aid to asylum countries and security in the refugees camps.

Meanwhile, 100 Zairian soldiers have already been working with the UNHCR on camp security, the spokesman said. Early next week, 15 international experts will arrive from the Netherlands to begin a training programme for over 1,500 soldiers from Zaire who will assist the UNHCR with security.

* * *

There were tremendous logistical difficulties associated with establishing an international prosecutors office, Judge Richard Goldstone, Chief Prosecutor for the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, told correspondents at Headquarters today. Mr. Goldstone said while he understood the frustrations and the sense of urgency felt by victims and human rights organizations, delays in setting up the Tribunal were not the result of any lack of will by the international community.

(more)

Mr. Goldstone said efficient, experienced lawyers, investigators and analysts were needed from as many countries as possible because geopraphical representation was fundementally important. Competent people were busy and needed time to relocate. The Tribunal was also operating under financial restraints and still only had two thirds of its staff, although he expected it to be fully staffed within the next few months.

Those indicted by the Tribunal were not "little fish", Mr. Goldstone said. They were charged with genocide and crimes against humanity and had been involved with murder, rape and torture. The Tribunal was intent on bringing charges at the earliest time possible against those who had ordered the crimes and conceived the policies. Indictments were chosen not only because of the seriousness of the specific allegations but because through them, it would be possible to establish a pattern of conduct which was inconsistent with spontaneous actions by paramilitary groups or anyone else. In order to charge the leaders, it was important to establish what had happened and that had to be done through eye-witnesses.

* *** *